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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: improving public-sector effectiveness

Statement submitted by the International Federation of Social Workers, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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On this day we submit the following statement on improving public sector effectiveness from the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). IFSW is a global organization striving for social justice, human rights and social development through the development of social work, best practices and international cooperation between social workers and their professional organizations. IFSW links professional social workers around the world with national organizations in 78 countries representing the voice of almost half a million social workers around the globe.

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.[1] It is from this frame of reference that we offer the following points for consideration to improving public sector effectiveness through well thought out and pragmatic program development.

Ethics and Human Rights - Only a caring and integral system of social development can facilitate human development and improve the quality of life. The process of social transformation has to be embodied in principles of social justice and human rights. Both government and private sector participation in social development has to be guided by social ethics of respect for people, principles of justice in the distribution of social benefits, rights and entitlement, power, status and opportunities, all guided by the concept of the common good.

Citizen Participation - The citizens and their participation in the development process have to be an integral part of social development. The reasons for involving citizens are many. Without doubt, participation itself is a rightful goal of the development process, it is a means towards the achievement of ends, and it restores the meaningful human interaction that is missing in contemporary society. We urge, therefore, leaders and organizers to understand the connection between democratic, collective decision-making and the realization of such human values as self-determination and empowerment.

A Participatory Model - A participatory model of development has to be established; everyday people in low-wealth communities should not be the target of the social development projects, but rather they should the people who determine, drive, and control the entire development process. Social development starts from the assumption that marginalized and low-income people best understand the problems they face and how to solve them. Development starts with the recognition of social needs and the organization of society to meet them. Governments and private sector organizations have a key role to play in increasing the needs of their constituencies. Before any program implementation, it is necessary, therefore, to engage in participatory and stakeholder research in which individuals, families and community members study issues and conditions that directly affect their lives. The goal of this work is social transformation and improvement in the lives of stakeholders through research, education and action.

[1] International Federation of Social Workers, 2000.

Partnership Building - The value of partnership is undeniable. Organizations today operate in a field with others who share community location, target population, issues and funding sources. Organizations can increase their effectiveness by making the best use of these connections. This contributes to building and sustaining bridges that maximize the resources available to deliver services. Partnerships allow groups to pursue bigger targets on a larger scale, address power inequities, shape public ideology, and build solutions to complex problems together. Partnership helps develop a common language and ideology, which shape a collective vision for social change.

In closing, we urge all governments and private sector organizations to take into account the above factors in policy making and organizing. The history of social development is the story of the recognition of effective development strategies. We, as a global non-governmental organization, wish to submit our statement to this forty-second session of the Commission for Social Development, with a view to improving public sector effectiveness through well thought out and pragmatic program development.